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# The Impact of the State Constitutional Convention of 1917 on State Aid to Higher Education in Massachusetts

*John P. Whittaker*

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*The Massachusetts State Constitutional Convention of 1917 marked a turning point in the development of higher education in the state. An amendment adopted at the convention put an end to a long tradition of direct state appropriations to support the development of private colleges and to proposals for cooperative efforts between various state agencies and private institutions. After that time, only state institutions would receive state support. This decision resulted from an attempt to resolve an intense debate over the use of public funding for sectarian and other private institutions, which reflected the intense religious and class conflict inherent in Massachusetts politics at the beginning of this century.*

*The 1917 amendment had the indirect effect of laying some of the groundwork for later expansion of the state public higher education system. The state legislature could now expand opportunities for access to higher education only through appropriations to state institutions. Private institutions in Massachusetts could grow only through securing funds from sources outside state government. It is possible that without the 1917 constitutional change, Massachusetts might have developed a system of higher education involving greater cooperative effort between the public and private sectors.*

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**T**he Massachusetts State Constitutional Convention of 1917 marked a turning point in the development of higher education in the state. An amendment adopted at the convention put an end to a long tradition of direct state appropriations to support the development of private colleges. After that time only state institutions, such as the normal schools and the agricultural college at Amherst, would receive state support. One of the most interesting features of this decision was that it grew out of the long-standing debate between the leadership of the state's Protestant and Catholic populations over the issue of public funding for sectarian institutions.

Since the adoption of the state constitution at the close of the Revolution, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts had been making significant grants of land and money to support institutions of higher education. This continued a policy that had been established early in the colonial period.

Chapter 96 of the Resolves of 1783, for example, provided 471 pounds to four Harvard

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professors for their teaching services. Harvard College received three hundred acres in each of twelve new townships under the provisions of Chapter 63 of the Resolves of 1790. Chapter 41 of the Resolves of 1795 granted Williams College "two townships of land, six miles square each, in the District of Maine."

Such support was regularly being given by the middle of the nineteenth century. Chapter 154 of the Acts of 1859 granted \$50,000 to Tufts College, \$25,000 to Williams College, and \$25,000 to Amherst College from the proceeds of land sold in the newly filled Back Bay section of Boston. A key provision of this act required each of the three colleges to establish three free scholarships, which would be awarded by the state Board of Education. The money in the grant would be paid in varying installments each year, depending on the balance remaining in the account for the receipt of sales of land after certain other financial obligations of the state were paid. No payment was to be made, however, until the governor and governor's council were satisfied that the institution had received an equal amount of endowment funds from private benefactors. Such provisions were commonly attached to these state appropriations.

Tables 1 through 3 provide an overview of state appropriations for higher education from 1860 through 1925. They illustrate the commonwealth's continuing commitment to the two "land-grant" institutions, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the Massachusetts Agricultural College at Amherst, founded in 1865 and in 1867, respectively, through use of funds provided by the Morrill Act. Four other colleges — Tufts, Williams, Amherst, and Mount Holyoke — continued to receive some state support dur-

*Table 1*

**Appropriations by the Massachusetts Legislature  
to Institutions of Higher Education, 1910–1917**

	Mass. Agricultural College	Mass. Institute of Technology	Worcester Polytechnic Institute	State Normal Schools	Textile Schools	University Extension	Total for Group
1910	\$245,700 28.3%	\$34,300 4.0%	\$15,000 1.7%	\$392,300 45.2%	\$181,500 20.9%	—	\$868,800 100.0%
1911	\$275,100 31.6%	\$34,300 3.9%	\$15,000 1.7%	\$404,900 46.4%	\$142,700 16.4%	—	\$872,000 100.0%
1912	\$267,900 26.7%	\$105,300 10.5%	\$50,000 5.0%	\$454,600 45.2%	\$127,300 12.6%	—	\$1,005,100 100.0%
1913	\$346,800 30.8%	\$105,300 9.3%	\$50,000 4.4%	\$463,800 41.2%	\$161,000 14.3%	—	\$1,126,900 100.0%
1914	\$393,800 34.3%	\$105,300 9.2%	\$50,000 4.4%	\$473,500 41.1%	\$126,600 11.0%	—	\$1,149,200 100.0%
1915	\$519,600 41.4%	\$105,300 8.4%	\$50,000 4.0%	\$464,300 37.0%	\$116,800 9.3%	—	\$1,256,000 100.0%
1916	\$430,000 34.2%	\$105,300 8.4%	\$50,000 4.0%	\$507,400 40.3%	\$116,000 9.2%	\$50,000 4.0%	\$1,258,700 100.0%
1917	\$351,400 28.7%	\$100,000 8.2%	\$50,000 4.1%	\$512,300 41.8%	\$136,100 11.1%	\$75,000 6.1%	\$1,224,800 100.0%
Total	\$2,830,300 32.3%	\$695,100 7.9%	\$330,000 3.8%	\$3,673,100 41.9%	\$1,108,000 12.6%	\$125,000 1.4%	\$8,761,500 100.0%

Source: *Bulletins for the State Constitutional Convention, 1917–1918* (Boston: Wright and Potter Printing, 1918–1919).

ing this period. The data in Tables 1 through 3 is taken from the legislative appropriations acts for each of the years indicated.

By the mid-1890s support was growing for the concept that the state should provide substantial support and encouragement for the further development of industry through direct grants to state institutions of higher education that were conducting research and instruction in science and technology. Tables 1 through 3 reflect a marked increase in allotments to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Worcester Polytechnic Institute, and the three technical schools that had been established in Lowell, New Bedford, and Fall River to provide instruction in the special technologies required in Massachusetts's flourishing textile industry. Continued support of the Massachusetts Agricultural College was viewed as the appropriate means for providing essential instruction in the latest advances in scientific food production and processing.

Enthusiasm for state funding of technology reached its peak with the adoption of Chapter 87 of the Resolves of 1912, which granted an increase in annual financial assistance to Worcester Polytechnic, and with the adoption of Chapter 78 of the Resolves of 1911, which granted an annual increase in funding to MIT.

A special financial relationship had developed between the Worcester Polytechnic Institute and the commonwealth over the previous forty years. Chapter 57 of the Resolves of 1869 provided the institute with a one-time grant of \$50,000. In return, the institute was to establish twenty free scholarships to be awarded by the state Board of Education. Chapter 407 of the Acts of 1896 mandated that the institute would receive \$3,000 per year and

Table 2

**Appropriations by the Massachusetts Legislature  
to Institutions of Higher Education, 1918–1925**

	Mass. Agricultural College	Mass. Institute of Technology	Worcester Polytechnic Institute	State Normal Schools	Textile Schools	University Extension	Total for Group
1918	\$371,900 23.8%	\$100,000 6.4%	\$50,000 3.2%	\$843,700 53.9%	\$110,000 7.0%	\$90,000 5.8%	\$1,565,600 100.0%
1919	\$580,000 27.7%	\$100,000 4.8%	\$50,000 2.4%	\$902,300 43.0%	\$342,000 16.3%	\$122,000 5.8%	\$2,096,300 100.0%
1920	\$797,200 32.3%	\$100,000 4.0%	\$50,000 2.0%	\$1,088,800 44.1%	\$272,700 11.0%	\$162,000 6.6%	\$2,470,700 100.0%
1921	\$852,900 33.0%	—	\$50,000 1.9%	\$1,159,500 45.0%	\$323,400 12.5%	\$196,000 7.6%	\$2,581,800 100.0%
1922	\$1,061,500 37.1%	—	—	\$1,252,500 43.7%	\$363,200 12.7%	\$188,000 6.6%	\$2,865,200 100.0%
1923	\$1,062,500 37.6%	—	—	\$1,248,800 44.1%	\$325,900 11.5%	\$192,000 6.8%	\$2,829,200 100.0%
1924	\$902,500 32.9%	—	—	\$1,334,400 48.6%	\$318,500 11.6%	\$189,000 6.9%	\$2,744,400 100.0%
1925	\$907,300 27.4%	—	—	\$1,928,900 58.2%	\$316,700 9.6%	\$163,500 4.9%	\$3,316,400 100.0%
Total	\$6,535,800 31.9%	\$300,000 1.5%	\$200,000 1.0%	\$9,758,900 47.7%	\$2,372,400 11.6%	\$1,302,500 6.4%	\$20,469,600 100.0%

Source: *Acts and Resolves Passed by the General Court of Massachusetts in the Years 1918–1925* (Boston: Wright and Potter Printing, 1918–1925).



Table 3

**Appropriations by the Massachusetts Legislature  
to Institutions of Higher Education, 1860–1916**

	Mass. Agricultural College	Mass. Institute of Technology	Worcester Polytechnic Institute	Other Private Colleges	Textile Schools	Total for Group
1860–1864	\$10,500	\$323,000	—	\$100,000	—	\$433,500
1865–1869	\$139,600	\$11,100	\$50,000	\$90,000	—	\$290,700
1870–1874	\$156,000	\$31,600	—	\$25,000	—	\$212,600
1875–1879	\$113,500	\$35,700	—	—	—	\$149,200
1880–1884	\$140,100	\$29,200	—	—	—	\$169,300
1885–1889	\$204,500	\$176,500	\$50,000	—	—	\$431,000
Total	\$764,200	\$607,100	\$100,000	\$215,000	—	\$1,686,300
1890–1894	\$202,400	\$76,200	\$100,000	—	—	\$378,600
1895–1899	\$280,800	\$145,800	\$15,000	—	\$108,000	\$549,600
1900–1904	\$373,900	\$171,600	\$30,000	—	\$408,800	\$984,300
1905–1909	\$912,000	\$171,200	\$50,000	—	\$452,600	\$1,585,800
1910–1914	\$1,529,300	\$384,500	\$180,000	—	\$739,100	\$2,832,900
1915–1916	\$949,600	\$210,600	\$100,000	—	\$232,800	\$1,493,000
Total	\$4,248,000	\$1,159,900	\$475,000	—	\$1,941,300	\$7,824,200

Source: *Bulletins for the State Constitutional Convention, 1917–1918* (Boston: Wright and Potter Printing, 1918–1919).

provide forty free scholarships to be awarded by the Board of Education on the basis of financial need and a competitive examination. The annual allotment was increased to \$6,000 per year in 1899 and to \$10,000 per year by Chapter 109 of the Acts of 1905.

By the second decade of this century, both Worcester Polytechnic and MIT were beginning to experience serious fiscal stress owing to rapid changes in technology and ever-increasing numbers of student applications. A veteran state representative, Martin Lomasney, prominent political boss of Boston's Ward 8, later complained that the answer of both institutions was to pull out all the stops in a concerted lobbying assault on the legislature by faculty, administrators, and alumni in an attempt to secure additional annual allotments. It would appear from Lomasney's statements that this lobbying effort tended to alienate legislators from urban working-class districts who felt that MIT and Worcester Polytechnic had nothing to offer their constituents. These initially successful tactics had the longer-term effect of bringing an end to state-funded subsidies for private higher education.<sup>1</sup>

On January 11, 1910, the trustees of Worcester Polytechnic presented the state legislature with a petition asking for a substantial increase in their annual allotment. The petition stated that the institute had spent over \$300,000 during the previous four years for updated equipment and a new electrical engineering laboratory. The trustees pointed out that the institute was providing forty free scholarships a year to indigent Massachusetts students, at a cost of \$300 per student, when nearly 70 percent of its student body was from Massachusetts and almost 30 percent were from outside of Worcester County. The institute boasted that, as of 1910, there were 465 Worcester Polytechnic alumni among the professional population of the commonwealth. The trustees stated that the point had been reached at which the current annual income of the institute was insufficient to meet current annual expenses and that it required immediate financial assistance if it was to survive and flourish. An indication of the political clout of these trustees can be drawn from the fact that the first name on the petition was that of Charles G. Washburn, U.S.

congressman from Worcester, a prominent Republican with important friends in the legislature.<sup>2</sup>

This petition resulted in the adoption of Chapter 562 of the Acts of 1910, which increased Worcester Polytechnic's annual state appropriation to \$15,000. Washburn and the other trustees were back in 1912 with another petition, complaining again that the income of the institute was insufficient to meet annual operating expenses despite "a most economical administration." Under Chapter 87 of the Acts of 1912, the legislature appropriated \$50,000 each year for the next ten years in support of the institute provided that it could demonstrate by 1917 that additional endowment funds in the amount of at least \$350,000 had been received during the same period.<sup>3</sup>

Similar lobbying efforts by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology were also successful. Chapter 78 of the Resolves of 1911 provided that, starting in 1912, the commonwealth would award MIT \$100,000 for each of the next ten years, to be expended under the direction of the trustees for the general purposes of the institute. Unless MIT was able to demonstrate by 1917 that it had received additional endowment funds of \$1 million, the annual state allotment for 1917 and the subsequent years of the agreement would not be paid. MIT would be required to provide eighty full need-based scholarships, to be awarded by the state Board of Education, to replace the existing eighty half scholarships that had been established under the provisions of previous state grants.

Popular support for a joint effort by state government and higher education to provide opportunities for research and instruction in the developing technologies reached a new phase during the early months of the administration of Governor David I. Walsh. The *Boston Transcript* of May 26, 1914, along with other Massachusetts newspapers, reported on a meeting of the Alumni Council of MIT at which a proposal was put forth that the newspaper regarded as "the initial move towards a great State University." This plan had the full support of Governor Walsh. Faculty members of MIT and other colleges would regularly be appointed to advisory positions on any state commission that conducted work which required scientific or technical expertise. The use of college science laboratories and technological shops and equipment would be placed at the disposal of the state under agreements that would at once provide safeguards for their maintenance and use as educational facilities and support for the special needs of state government. The state would reimburse the institutions for labor, materials, and depreciation. A bureau of technical information would be established to provide the general public with technical and scientific information at minimal cost. The governor would appoint a permanent committee to promote the expansion of cooperative efforts between the state and the various institutions of higher education. Governor Walsh had expressed support for this concept at a banquet of the MIT Alumni Association in January, and it had received immediate favorable attention from prominent alumni and faculty.

President Richard Maclaurin of MIT was most enthusiastic about the proposal. His comments in reaction to the plan reflect, within the context of the role of higher education, an excellent example of the optimistic spirit of the progressive era. He noted that the cooperative effort between state government and institutions of higher education was likely to develop into "one of the biggest things, in that it makes it practical to bring together in hearty unity and collaboration all the institutions of the Commonwealth. . . . We are at the birth of the most important movements of the times, and the idea of bringing in all the institutions at the beginning is eminently sensible."<sup>4</sup> Maclaurin perhaps viewed the proposal as a potential source of additional funding to help MIT cope with the financing of an institution on the verge of rapid modernization and expansion. The future direction

of the institute was still uncertain. A proposal was under consideration by MIT and Harvard for cooperative merged graduate programs. MIT had not yet settled in its present location on the banks of the Charles River in Cambridge. There had been at least one serious proposal for the institute to move to central Massachusetts.

Massachusetts commissioner of education David Snedden was at the meeting with Governor Walsh and expressed a utilitarian view of the immediate value of the "opening of this remarkable vista. . . . The question of ventilation is a pressing one which scientists should cooperate with the education authorities in answering," he remarked, "and the sanitation of rural school houses is but in its infancy."<sup>5</sup>

Unlike several other states, Massachusetts had neither a state university to support research and instruction in the new technological developments nor strong political support for the establishment of a state university. In providing extensive financial support to MIT, the legislature set a strong precedent for continued state financial support to the state's private institutions for the development of programs in science and technology in exchange for state-administered scholarship programs that would provide access to talented disadvantaged students. This might well have become the model for state support for higher education in Massachusetts in the decades to come. The proposal for cooperative efforts by the state and the higher education institutions might have grown into an impressive alternative to the cooperative extension programs of the great land-grant universities of the midwestern states. However, the broader political process within the state was about to alter these prospects seriously.

Political support for expansion of cooperative efforts between MIT and the state and for similar relationships with other institutions was far from unanimous. As the bill granting MIT \$1 million over ten years was being considered by the state senate in March 1911, it became snagged on an amendment offered by Senator Joseph P. Lomasney of Boston, younger brother and protégé of Martin Lomasney. Under Senator Lomasney's amendment, each state senator would have tighter control over the selection of MIT scholarship recipients from his senatorial district. There would also be stronger guarantees that the scholarships would be fairly apportioned among the senatorial districts. The scholarship examination to be administered by the Board of Education would be required to be advertised in at least one newspaper published in every city of the commonwealth and in at least two newspapers published in Boston. Lomasney's amendment also provided that "at the examinations held under the provisions of this act, no question shall be asked concerning the religious or political opinions of any candidate for a scholarship."<sup>6</sup>

Joseph Lomasney's amendment signaled the surfacing of fears that had been openly expressed in the past by his brother Martin and others on behalf of Boston's working-class Irish-Catholic population. This group had begun to express an opinion that these state-funded scholarships and special appropriations for higher education were not intended for the benefit of their constituents and thus represented an unfair and inappropriate use of public funds. Joseph Lomasney later withdrew his amendment and the bill passed essentially as proposed, but the battle lines had been drawn. The question of state funding for private institutions was to become part of the major debate on what would be labeled the anti-aid or nonsectarian amendment to the Massachusetts state constitution, which dominated much of the 1917 session of the constitutional convention.

The question of state aid to parochial or sectarian schools had been the subject of hot debate in Massachusetts for over a century. The original wording of the Massachusetts constitution adopted in 1780 stated that the legislature had the right "and ought to provide



at the expenses of the subject, if necessary, a suitable support for the public worship of God.” Because of objections from Baptists and other religious minority sects, this power was later delegated by the legislature to the towns. Most towns in the commonwealth originally compelled all taxpayers to provide financial support to the local Congregational church, which often performed double duty as the town’s civic meeting hall. In towns dominated by a Baptist majority, the Baptist church might receive the public funds and double as the town hall. Under the Religious Freedom Act of 1811, a citizen was allowed to transfer the taxes he paid to the town treasurer to the church of his choice. The eleventh amendment to the Massachusetts constitution, adopted in 1833, provided that “all religious sects and denominations demeaning themselves peaceably and as good citizens of the Commonwealth, shall be equally under the protection of the law, and no subordination of any one sect or denomination to another shall ever be established by law.”<sup>7</sup>

With the great increase in immigration in the 1840s and 1850s, particularly of Irish and German Roman Catholics, the issue of whether the state or cities and towns should provide public funds for sectarian schools came into sharp focus. It became a major concern of the 1853 state constitutional convention. In 1855 the commonwealth adopted the eighteenth amendment to its constitution, which provided that all local and state tax money “shall be applied to and expended in no other schools than those which are conducted according to law, under the order and superintendence of the authorities of the town or city in which the money is to be expended; and such moneys shall never be appropriated to any religious sect for the maintenance exclusively of its own schools.”<sup>8</sup>

In 1866 the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts dealt with an early test of the applicability of the eighteenth amendment to the granting of state funds to private colleges. In the case of *Merrick v. Inhabitants of Amherst*, the court rejected a suit brought by certain taxpayers of the town of Amherst that would have restrained the town’s officers from issuing bonds and borrowing money in support of the new state agricultural college being developed in their town. In rendering their decision the justices stated,

The phrases “public schools” and “common schools” have acquired under the legislation and practice of this State a well-settled signification. They are never applied to the higher seminaries of learning, such as incorporated academies and colleges. These, in a certain broad and comprehensive sense, are public institutions, because they are controlled by corporations and are usually open to all persons who are willing to comply with the terms of admission and tuition. . . . We should be slow to come to the conclusion that the amendment was designed to take from the Legislature the power which had always been exercised from the earliest periods of our history, of making grants of land and money to incorporated academies and colleges.<sup>9</sup>

A series of additional court decisions and opinions issued by the state’s attorney general in the years that followed established clearly that the intent of the amendment was to prohibit public appropriations for purely religious schools or colleges. Despite this fact, beginning in 1900, a proposed amendment to the state constitution was introduced annually during each legislative session through 1916 that would have been more specific in prohibiting the use of public funds for “any institution, school, or society or undertaking which is wholly or in part under sectarian or ecclesiastical control.”

Under this new amendment such Jesuit-sponsored institutions as the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester and Boston College, as well as the Catholic archdiocese of Boston’s growing system of parochial schools, would clearly be ineligible for public funding.



This was an intentional move by the non-Catholic, nativist political majority who were becoming concerned about inroads by nonnative Catholic Democrats.

It had never been the practice of the native Protestant majority to set up schools along sectarian lines, although curricula at the public schools had always included a healthy portion of essentially Calvinist doctrine and moral values. Since the inclusion of these "nondenominational" religious values did not reflect a strictly sectarian bias, in the Methodist or Baptist sense of the word *sectarian*, it was not seen as being prohibited by the state constitution. Private colleges and institutions that numbered Protestant ministers among their faculty and trustees were also not considered to be "sectarian" for the same reason. Roman Catholic colleges or seminaries, established for the purpose of instructing students in their own particular denomination's religious values, would be considered sectarian, since they were founded to impart one denomination's particular world view. This era had a far different opinion of the proper relationship between church and state from our own, which stems from subsequent interpretations of the import of the First Amendment to the federal Constitution.

Roman Catholic leaders, and their church hierarchy, were incensed at the introduction of this proposed amendment, which they deemed an act of prejudice. Their numbers were strong enough to put together an alliance in each session of the legislature to block its passage. They were never strong enough, however, to vote measures providing state support for Catholic institutions.

Martin Lomasney, one of this group's principal spokesmen, took a totally different approach to the issue. The son of Irish immigrants, Lomasney was a tough, seasoned, inner-city politician who had risen from an obscure and impoverished beginning through the "school of hard knocks" of Boston Democratic Party politics in the late nineteenth century. Lomasney's biographer, Leslie G. Ainsley, provides this description of his political style. "Lomasney was the aggressive type of political fighter. In his code there were no neutrals in politics. He was shrewd, ambitious, vindictive. He never minced words or pulled punches. He fought as hard as he could, accepted and gave no quarter."<sup>10</sup>

Ainsley goes on to say

He had many political axioms which voiced his practical down-to-earth theories as to politics. These included such often repeated policies as: "From the standpoint of politics, the great mass of the people are interested in only three things, food, clothing, and shelter. A politician in a district such as mine [Boston's Ward 8] sees to it that his people get these things. If he does he doesn't have to worry about their loyalty and support."<sup>11</sup>

Ainsley quotes Raymond L. Bridgeman, a contemporary newspaperman and the official historian of the constitutional convention:

Martin M. Lomasney of Boston was conspicuously the most intense personal force in the convention. He was a leader, a hard hitter, a fair fighter, generous, sympathetic, respected, by all who came close enough to feel the strength of his personal qualities.<sup>12</sup>

In his record of an interview with Lomasney, Lincoln Steffens provided a similar image of Lomasney,

He saw things straight and talked straight about them. He had the mind and imagination to do that. And he had heart, both for daring and for kindness.<sup>13</sup>

Steffens provides the following Lomasney quote, which defines the role of the city ward boss.

“I think,” said Martin Lomasney, “that there’s got to be in every ward somebody that any bloke can come to, no matter what he’s done, and get help. Help, you understand; none of your law and your justice, but help.”<sup>14</sup>

Lomasney spoke for himself in a 1923 interview with the *Boston Globe*.

“Is somebody out of a job? We do our best to place him and not necessarily on the public payroll. Does the family run in arrears with the landlord or the butcher? Then we lend a helping hand. Do the kids need shoes or clothing, or the mother a doctor? We do what we can, and since as the world is run, such things must be done, we keep old friends and make new ones.”<sup>15</sup>

While the legislature was proceeding once again through its annual debate on the “anti-sectarian amendment,” Lomasney rose on April 22, 1914, to suggest that the amendment be changed by adding a clause that would prohibit the use of public funds for any college, or other institution, which was not directly under the control of the state or a county, city, or town and governed by the provisions of a state statute or local ordinance. With a quick move Lomasney had changed the agenda from consideration of strengthening the existing ban on state aid to parochial schools to the total elimination of the long-standing practice of awarding state appropriations to private colleges. Both the Lomasney-Fitzgerald amendment and the antisectarian amendment were rejected after intense debate. Both were presented and rejected again in 1915 and 1916. The issues behind the amendments continued to be hotly debated, and they became the basis for the first item considered by the 1917 special state constitutional convention.<sup>16</sup> Martin Lomasney resigned his seat in the Massachusetts House of Representatives so that he could accept a position as a delegate to this convention.

Charles G. Washburn, the Worcester Polytechnic trustee, was elected as one of the Worcester delegates to the convention. Washburn was a lifelong native of Worcester and an alumnus of the Worcester Polytechnic Institute class of 1875. A staunch Republican, Washburn had served a term in both the Massachusetts House and Senate at the turn of the century before moving on to Congress from 1906 through 1911. His career as a spokesperson for the Massachusetts establishment also included service as one of the first directors of the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston.<sup>17</sup>

The debate on the antisectarian amendment raged for several weeks following the opening of the convention. The verbatim transcripts of this epic debate fill more than 180 pages of the printed record on these proceedings, which was published by the commonwealth in 1919. Extracts from this debate provide insight into the motivation and thinking of Lomasney and his supporters as well as those who advocated continued state subsidies for private institutions of higher education.

At the beginning of the debate, Washburn moved to protect the status quo and privileged position of MIT and Worcester Polytechnic by proposing that a sentence be added to the proposed amendment stating that “the General Court may make appropriations for scholarships in technical and engineering schools in which State scholarships now exist.”<sup>18</sup> In supporting this proposal, Washburn argued that if the Lomasney amendment passed unchanged, the state would be faced with an ironic situation in which it would still be able to provide funding to the agricultural college at Amherst but not to the Massachusetts col-

leges of science and technology despite the fact that the annual industrial output of Massachusetts was over twenty times that of its agricultural sector.

Washburn argued,

“What will follow as sure as the day follows night is that those adversely affected are going to cry out in indignant protest against this discrimination, and are going to demand a State University. I know that the establishment of a State University has some adherents on this floor, and this suggestion may be an argument why this amendment of mine should be killed in order to make imperative the demand for a State University. Personally, I do not believe that we need a State University in Massachusetts. I would prefer to see the state take advantage of institutions now in existence as far as they can be used.”<sup>19</sup>

Lomasney countered with the argument that the private institutions were not under the control of the state and thus there was no guarantee that the state’s money would be directed toward students with the greatest financial need. He stated,

“If the gentleman from Worcester will come forward and convey to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts this institution [Worcester Polytechnic Institute] and go forward and educate Massachusetts’ sons at the expense of Massachusetts, then open it to Massachusetts’ control and not to private control; then, Mr. Chairman, all men of intelligence will commend his action. It is a wrong thing, to have a private school of that kind in any city or any county or in the State, where you may take the poor boy or the rich boy and give him an opportunity for advancement at the public expense, to which every young man in the state does not have access. To-day they have the power to dictate who shall go there to be educated, and the public contribute in part moneys that support the institution. That is all wrong.”

Lomasney then went on to express a concern that may have been the primary source of his group’s position, the fear of an upper-class oligarchy, which would allocate and manipulate public funds for its own narrow interests.

“We never should make an educated class in this Commonwealth.

“These large institutions have powerful weapons to work with. I do not want to criticize the Massachusetts Institute of Technology or any one of them; but when they start for the public money, corporation influence is nothing to it. If ever you had a friend who had done you a favor he is reached. He is after you night and day. And with this power in their hands the bars go down. You yield, not for money, not for promises, but to these influences. If you have a note at the bank, you are reached and you are asked to support the institution. If you have a contract, you have an engineer over you; you are asked by that engineer to favor the proposition. And so on down the line.

“It [Worcester Polytechnic Institute] should in decency convey this property to the State, if it wants to be aided longer, and let the doors be opened to all the sons of Massachusetts whom he and the board of trustees may designate. It still wants to select the students; but why should the son of a poor mechanic toiling in the mills of Lowell be taxed so that the son of his uncle or brother could be educated as an engineer and always be capable of earning five or ten thousand dollars yearly, while the son of the mechanic never could get over one thousand? It is class legislation, it is improper legislation.”<sup>20</sup>

Lomasney was joined by other delegates in expressing this fear. Ralph S. Bauer, delegate from the industrial city of Lynn, stated,



“Every man here knows that when it comes to a question of disposition of the free scholarships that are made available by state appropriation they are not always allotted to the needy boy, or to the deserving boy, or to the boy whose parents cannot afford to send him to the institution; they are very often placed because of political expediency. Even our state commissions, which sometimes have the final say on the allotment of these scholarships, are not indifferent to the influences of political expediency, as I personally know.”

Bauer then expressed an opinion common at the time, that young people who really wanted a college education should earn the cost of tuition through their own efforts. The sweat and strain would make them finer persons in the end. State assistance and state scholarships were, therefore, unnecessary. Besides, what guarantee was there that the newly graduated student would choose to stay in the commonwealth and pay her back for her generosity by becoming a useful citizen? As Bauer put it,

“Any boy in this Commonwealth, if he has the right stuff in him and is determined to fight his own battles, can today work his way through the Institute of Technology or the Worcester Polytechnic Institute or any other institution in this state, and those who do it in this way are a far greater asset to this Commonwealth than boys to whom have been allotted scholarships under those conditions under which they have been given out during the past few years. Many of the boys who get these scholarships, most of them who get these scholarships, do not remain in this Commonwealth and make this place the home of their life’s effort, and Massachusetts in no way gets back very much for that kind of investment.”<sup>21</sup>

The delegates from Lowell and Fall River were concerned about maintaining vital state support for the textile schools in their communities. They joined with other representatives of private institutions in opposing the amendment. They argued that the state should certainly be willing to share some of the costs of maintaining the textile schools and other private institutions of higher education, since the commonwealth was deriving great benefits from their programs. John W. Cummings, a delegate from Fall River, spoke for this group.

“When we look for higher education, education that the state requires for some of its citizens, we have to look to private institutions. Let’s face that fact . . . How strange it seems for an enlightened community, for an enlightened state, that it has to confess that it is dependent upon private institutions for the furtherance of higher education, dependence upon private charity in a large degree for the care of its afflicted, and yet, relying upon these institutions, dependent upon them, it turns and says: You may help us, you may help the state, the state needs your help, but the state cannot help you.”<sup>22</sup>

Despite these arguments, the change proposed by Washburn was rejected by vote of the convention.

Toward the close of debate on the amendment, Martin Lomasney introduced the issue of religious discrimination, which was at the heart of his group’s opposition.

“How can they sit there with their views and allow all of us in the state who are Catholics to be taxed to maintain institutions of higher learning that are just as Protestant in their educational purposes and in their control as our institutions are Catholic?”

“It is taxation without representation, because it is impossible for a Catholic to live in some of these institutions that have been getting money from the state under private control and be treated as he should be. I make no reference to any one of them speci-

cally. It is wrong in principle . . . Now, Mr. President, the Worcester Polytechnic Institute has done good work, but there are three ministers on that board, gentlemen of ability. I make no unfriendly reference to the institution. It has done great work in the community. But there are three ministers on the board. What would you say of an institution that had three Catholic priests on the board? Would you not say that it was somewhat sectarian?"<sup>23</sup>

The amendment prohibiting use of public funds for any private educational institution was passed by the convention by a vote of 130 yeas to 60 nays and sent to the people for approval at the annual state election in November.

Lomasney and his colleagues had been acting in the years immediately prior to the constitutional convention and throughout the 1917 session of that body under the assumption that they had the full support of the hierarchy of the archdiocese of Boston and its patriarch, Cardinal William O'Connell. Lomasney later claimed in a newspaper interview that he had checked the language of his amendment on repeated occasions with the corporate counsel of the archdiocese, Henry V. Cunningham, and received unqualified approval.<sup>24</sup> But as Election Day approached, Cardinal O'Connell and other Roman Catholic leaders across the state began a campaign of strong public opposition to the amendment. On Sunday, September 23, 1917, before the convention had completed its work, the Boston archdiocese weekly newspaper, *The Pilot*, contained an editorial sharply critical of the amendment. By November 1, the cardinal felt the need to deny publicly, through letters to the media, that his opposition was based on instructions from Rome.<sup>25</sup>

On Monday, October 30, 1917, the *Boston Globe* provided a reprint of a speech O'Connell had delivered the previous day to twenty-five hundred delegates of the Catholic Federation at their Boston meeting. The cardinal charged that the proposed amendment was the work of Protestant bigots in the state legislature and other positions of influence in Massachusetts who had been content over the past several years with giving in excess of \$15 million to the "Protestant institutions." O'Connell stated that the Protestants had come to fear the rising tide of political strength of Massachusetts's Roman Catholic population and desired to shut off forever the flow of funds for fear that they would go to Catholic institutions. He stated that, as a citizen of Massachusetts, he valued the programs conducted on behalf of the people by the state's many private institutions and felt that they deserved to continue to have access to state funds as needed to continue their good work.<sup>26</sup>

Through interviews with the news media, Martin Lomasney expressed his continued devotion to the religious teaching of the Roman Catholic church but also expressed his personal insistence on the need for strict independence of judgment and action when it came to making decisions on civic matters. The conflict between the two men came to an intense climax in the days immediately preceding the state election. The front page of the *Boston Globe* on the day before the vote presented the opposing comments of Lomasney and O'Connell side by side in a feature article on the amendment. The degree to which the cardinal was committed to making this an intensely religious issue in order to defeat the amendment was revealed in newspaper coverage of a speech he delivered on the Sunday before the election at a large gathering at the Blessed Gabriel Monastery in the Brighton section of Boston. Lomasney and his group of supporters at the convention were compared to Judas accepting the thirty pieces of silver. O'Connell charged that they had been tricked into betraying their people by the Protestants at the convention and were too proud to admit their mistake. The cardinal stated,

"No Catholic of Massachusetts will, I feel sure, allow himself to be thus deceived. To

sin against the light is a sin against the Holy Ghost and the penalty for that is an awful one. The meanest, the vilest thing that any man can do is to betray the confidence, the perfect trust of a friend.”<sup>27</sup>

The Lomasney compromise amendment passed by a solid majority in all but a few of the commonwealth’s cities and towns despite Cardinal O’Connell’s intense effort to marshal Roman Catholic voters in opposition. No precise data exists on the voting pattern of Roman Catholics or other religious groups. However, the fact that the measure passed by substantial margins in the city of Boston and other urban centers with large Roman Catholic populations indicates that the cardinal’s position was apparently seen by Catholics as the personal political view of a prominent religious leader rather than an important pronouncement on religious dogma to be followed with unquestioning obedience by the faithful. Considerable evidence exists of an indifference toward expansion of parochial education and a preference for public education on the part of many Roman Catholics in Massachusetts during the early decades of this century.<sup>28</sup> Massachusetts voters, both Catholic and Protestant, were apparently influenced by the more moderate statements of such pro-amendment supporters as Professor Frederick L. Anderson of the Newton Theological Seminary, a Baptist and delegate to the constitutional convention, who campaigned tirelessly for passage of the measure in the fall of 1917. In a typical speech delivered during this campaign, Anderson stated,

“The people of Massachusetts are resolved to end this controversy by ending it right, by providing that no Catholic shall ever hereafter be taxed for the support of Protestantism, that no Protestant shall hereafter be taxed for the support of Catholicism, and no Jew or agnostic shall ever be taxed for the support of either. This is a perfectly square deal all around, and will satisfy all except that fraction of Protestants and Catholics who are bound to have public funds for their own particular brand of religion, who want forced contributions for their good causes.”<sup>29</sup>

The public appears also to have been strongly influenced by political advertisements in the newspapers that presented Anderson’s arguments and carried the endorsement of a cross section of prominent Catholics, Protestants, and Jews, including such respected leaders as former governor David I. Walsh and Charles Francis Adams. An indication that the majority of Roman Catholic voters viewed the issue as essentially a civil rather than religious issue is reflected in the fact that Walsh, who had the distinction of being the first Roman Catholic to be elected governor of Massachusetts and would within a few years be elected to the first of several terms as U.S. senator, would be so frank and open in his opposition to the position of Cardinal O’Connell. The United States was then on the brink of war hysteria. During the first week of November the newspapers carried the dread news of the first American combat deaths in the fighting in France. The *Boston Globe* carried page-one reports of the investigation by the Secret Service of an alleged plot by German sympathizers, centered in Boston, to sabotage the U.S. mails by flooding them with mass mailings opposing the war effort. There was abroad in Massachusetts a sense that the nation was in dire peril and that this was no time for petty sectarian or ethnic squabbles. A popular slogan of the period stated, “We are all Americans now!”

The cardinal had selected the wrong time and the wrong tactics in his attempt to arouse Roman Catholic voters in support of state aid to the archdiocese’s charitable and educational institutions. In a laudatory biography of O’Connell, which received the official approval and imprimatur of O’Connell’s successor, Archbishop Richard J. Cushing, Dorothy G. Wayman provided a tacit admission of O’Connell’s mistake.



When the controversial issue of aid to education was fought over in the Massachusetts Constitutional Convention of 1917, Cardinal O'Connell took the stump in opposition to the amendment proposed by Martin Lomasney which would have prohibited public funds for "any church or religious society or any college or other institution which is not a public institution established by law." Lomasney was hitting at non-Catholic bodies, such as Harvard or Massachusetts Institute of Technology, which had been generously endowed by the state legislature from time to time. Eighty-five out of ninety Catholic delegates, including ex-Governor David I. Walsh, had voted for the amendment and were embarrassed when the Cardinal publicly called it "an insult to Catholics." Massachusetts citizens, however, ratified it at the polls by a two-to-one majority.<sup>30</sup>

In their effort to prevent public funding of sectarian institutions, the commonwealth's "old guard" also had to bring to an end the era of state financial assistance for private colleges. The existing agreements with MIT and Worcester Polytechnic continued to be honored, but there were no further appropriations. Under the provisions of Chapters 246, 248, and 274 of the Acts of 1918, the three textile schools were accepted by the legislature as state institutions and as such formed the nucleus of what became the University of Lowell and Southeastern Massachusetts University. After 1917, state grants to private colleges and universities were prohibited, as were individual grants of financial aid or state-funded scholarships to individual students. This constitutional prohibition on state financial aid to college students was not reversed until adoption of an amendment to the state constitution by popular referendum in 1974.

In a subtle and indirect way, the amendment of 1917 opened the door for later expansion of the state's system of public higher education. Colleges and universities would be either public or private. If the state legislature wished to expand opportunities for access to higher education it could do so only through appropriations to the state system of public higher education. MIT, Northeastern University, Worcester Polytechnic Institute, and the state's other emerging institutions of public higher education could grow only through securing funds from sources outside state government. It is possible that without the 1917 constitutional change, Massachusetts might have developed a much different system of higher education, one which included substantial state funding for scholarships, research, and cooperative extension programs at the many private institutions. The impetus and foundations for the development of such a system were in place prior to the constitutional convention.

Within the two decades following World War II, Massachusetts spent millions in expanding the old state agricultural college into a full state university and the old state normal schools into a comprehensive state college system and creating a community college system to accommodate the growing need of its citizens for access to affordable higher education. This occurred despite the existence of a plethora of outstanding privately endowed colleges and universities throughout the commonwealth. One important reason this happened was that the private institutions could not possibly have met all the sudden and rapid increase in enrollment demand which occurred in the immediate postwar years, and again during the early 1960s, without a major infusion of funds to support expansion of facilities and programs. Given the constitutional ban imposed in 1917, the state could not provide such funding as an alternative to expanding the system of public higher education.



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## Notes

1. Samuel C. Prescott, *When MIT Was "Boston Tech" 1861–1916* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1954), 252–258.
2. Petition of the trustees of Worcester Polytechnic Institute, January 11, 1910, filed with the docket for Chapter 562 of the Acts of 1910, Collections of the Massachusetts State Archives.
3. Petition of the trustees of Worcester Polytechnic Institute, filed with the docket and related papers pertaining to Chapter 87 of the Acts of 1910, Collections of the Massachusetts State Archives.
4. "Tech-State University: Move to This End Is Begun by Alumni Council," *Boston Transcript*, May 26, 1914.
5. Ibid.
6. *Journal of the Massachusetts State Senate*, 1911, 532–533, 645–646.
7. *Bulletins for the State Constitutional Convention, 1917–1918*, vol. 2, sec. 2, "The Relation of Church and State in Massachusetts" (Boston: Wright and Potter Printing, 1917–1918), 17–18.
8. Ibid., 18–20.
9. Ibid., 20–21.
10. Leslie G. Ainsley, *Boston Mahatma* (Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1949), 55.
11. Ibid., 59.
12. Ibid., 138.
13. Lincoln Steffens, *The Autobiography of Lincoln Steffens* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1931), 617.
14. Ibid., 618.
15. *Boston Globe*, December 2, 1923.
16. *Bulletins for the State Constitutional Convention*, 25–29.
17. *Who's Who in America*, vol. 11, 1920–1921 (Chicago: A. N. Marquis, 1920).
18. *Debates in the Massachusetts Constitutional Convention, 1917–1918* (Boston: Wright and Potter Printing, 1919), 46.
19. Ibid., 83.
20. Ibid., 85–87.
21. Ibid., 88.
22. Ibid., 88–95.
23. Ibid., 299–301.
24. "Plan Agreed to by All, Says Lomasney," *Boston Globe*, November 5, 1917.
25. Ibid., November 2, 1917.
26. Ibid., October 30, 1917.
27. Ibid., November 5, 1917.
28. For further information on Roman Catholic indifference toward development of parochial education, see Timothy J. Meagher, "The Delayed Development of Parochial Education among Irish Catholics in Worcester," in *Education in Massachusetts: Selected Essays* (Westfield: Institute for Massachusetts Studies, Westfield State College, 1989), 78–100, and the numerous other sources cited by Meagher.

29. *Boston Globe*, November 5, 1917.
30. Dorothy G. Wayman, *Cardinal O'Connell of Boston: A Biography of William Henry O'Connell, 1859-1944* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Young, 1955), 227-228.